Ford Wrestles With Data on Assassinations

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WASHINGTON — President Ford is wrestling with the question of how best to handle data on assassination plots found in the minutes of National Security Council meetings between 1959 and 1963, authoritative Administration sources said Monday.

The data, these sources said, was discovered as White House aides began searching for information requested by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. It was not part of the material gathered by Vice-President Nelson Rockefeller's commission to investigate the Central Intelligence Agency.

As a result it was not part of the background for an 86-page "summary" on assassination plots prepared by the commission and turned over to Ford, the sources said.

According to one source the material is a graphic history of U. S. foreign policy in the Caribbean during the late 1950s and early 1960s.

"Though there is no direct memo signed by President John F. Kennedy saying go assassinate Castro," this source said, "there is material in minutes taken between 1959 and 1963 which is important if the focus is on assassination."

Ford already has pledged to make this material available to the Senate Select Committee, possibly under special security ground rules, and it will be turned over to the Dept. of Justice. But the President feels, one source said, that the administration must take its own role in the handling of the data.

The White House investigation of assassinations and plots to assassinate foreign leaders is continuing, the sources said.

According to sources who have seen the material, it is couched in the framework of how to deal with the rising threat of Cuban Premier Fidel Castro. There are discussions of direct operations against Castro, the sources said, as well as of operations which might have the effect of turning a group or country against Castro.

"There were some pretty bizarre suggestions, as though a group of guys were sitting around and talking over a beer. At least I hope there was beer," one source said.

He added: "Some suggestions were like 'let's kill a couple of governors' (in the United States) to get the American people mad enough to invade Cuba. By the way, that's not one of the suggestions, but that's the kind of thing you'll find. This material is a shopping list of bizarre plans, a hodge podge," he said.

What concerned the President when he learned of the material was that raw data, "unevaluated and undigested" would be made public out of context and could be harmful to the national image.

This source said, and sources on Capitol Hill confirmed, that the press reports of CIA plots against the late French President Charles De Gaulle have been the "very kind of" exaggeration that accompanied the question of misuse of raw data.

"The plan to kill DeGaulle was a totally unsolicited suggestion, out of the blue, from someone outside the CIA and was rejected by the CIA," one source said.

"It's publication is why it's spurious to use raw, undigested intelligence material," he added.

In order to prepare some "orderly" way to publicly present the material in the minutes of the meetings of the National Security Council, one source said, Ford has contemplated a special briefing for the leaders of Congress as well as the investigating committees, or a carefully prepared public statement. "He (the President) feels he must do something himself," the source said.